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Reviews.

ENGLISH OPERA.

EVERY new movement in the direction of popularizing ART proves more conclusively that its basis is misunderstood. It is power everywhere that carries off the palm, rather than earnestness: most especially in Music is this demonstrated. The roulade and cadenza bring the house down, while the Art which is so true and earnest that its surface is never recognized, is passed quietly by.

Now, Music is to thought or feeling, just what color is to form. Its analogies are most complete throughout—let us by the aid of a little common sense carry them to an application. It is presumed that the object of Anglicizing the Opera is to popularize it,—to introduce it as an element into the popular culture. If, then, we recollect that in it, the thought is the basis, and that the Music is a harmonizing element thrown around it, it is not difficult to understand why there has been so little success in the attempts to introduce the Opera into the American list of popular enjoyments.

There may be something—there probably is—in the want of a high standard of musical culture, but it is useless to insist on this until other more evident barriers to its success are removed. There must be a popular basis to begin with. There are few living journalists who cannot recollect when a novel or poem based on purely American material would not have been considered certain to fail; yet, at this day, the most thoroughly popular works are *American* in every respect. It is not necessary that the libretto of an Opera should be formed from an American story, but there is a necessity that it should be formed from one which is appreciable by all. A libretto which in itself interests, cannot fail to become more winning by the added charms of Music and representation.

There is, we are aware, nothing profound in this, but it is a piece of common sense which is too little thought of. The basis of an Opera is its libretto, and the history of the Art proves that an Opera of which the libretto is poor can never be popular.

The Greek Drama seems to us, after all, the model of our modern musical representations, as far as it goes. Ancient Music was simple melody, and, if with the progress of the science, we, in our day, have failed to produce the same effect that they did, it is because we have not remembered, as they did, that when music and thought are combined, the order of Nature must be followed, *i. e.*, that thought, as the more important of the two, must be kept in advance. With them the mightiest poems were most worthily sung—their every-day drama was musical, and music-winged, sunk into the hearts of their audiences, but it was never for the Music's sake that poems were made.

Modern knowledge of music is to that of the Greek times as a man's knowledge to that of a child; yet it is to be doubted, if the art is as effective on the manners and morals of the world as then. There is no reason why this must be—there is no reason why, because we have added the perfect development of harmony to music, that it should become merely a something to fascinate sense, "tickler and fanner of the

soul's sleep." The reason is evident when we consider that it has become a thing by itself—studied for itself, and not in the relations which it bears to our thoughts and moral feelings. With the exception of the sacred musical compositions of the church, and to a certain extent in song music, there is no attempt to subordinate sound to sense.

Let us recur again to the analogy we drew between music and color. Their positions are the same—the one being an adjunct of the visible, as the other is of the audible. Suppose an artist to attempt a piece of color without any reference to a subject for a picture—let him develop the harmony of his science to the highest possible perfection, let every tone and tint be all that is desirable as color—is it still a work of High Art? It may be great, it may be noble, it may be beautiful to the highest degree, but is it a thing calculated to produce any influence on the human mind more than a passing emotion—a perception of harmony, soothing and tranquilizing for the moment, but passing like letters in the sea sand? And what more is music, not subserved to ideas? It may well be beautiful, delightful, and wonderful in its power and effect, but that power is wasted, and that effect transient, unless it have some influence in the after lives of its auditors. Are we placed in the world to be charmed, lulled into content with ourselves and the things around us? If not, then has no art answered its function with us until it has compelled us to aspire, to determine better things for ourselves.

We do not mean to say, that Music has failed to fulfil this end, except so far as it does not meet the conditions we have demanded of it. The music of the church partially, as we have said, answers its purpose—the oratorio recognizes this demand. Nay, the opera itself nominally does so; and yet there is not an opera in existence in which the musician is not the more important author, and in which the libretto has not been written to order to be set to music. As poetic productions, the librettos are most flimsy things—if a good plot is given, it seems to satisfy all the demands made upon it, and to look for true poetic sentiment in one would be an impertinence. Is not this stringing pearls upon cotton strings?

It is idle to say that we demand impossibilities—or that we are degrading the musician, by making him an underworker to the poet. We rather elevate music to the position of helper and co-mate of poetry. It is degraded by uselessness, or subservience to sense and passion, but the noblest position it, or poetry, can be given, is that of a support to the immortal longings of humanity. Is color abused by being a part of painting? And, do we degrade the colorist, when we require him to be an artist in the higher sense of the word? No more is the musician made less in the eyes of the world, when he is the helper to the poet, in the noblest of all missions.

Let us imagine something "Utopian," a poem by a mighty, earnest poet, set to the music of a musician capable of feeling, and desiring to express, the loftiest emotions of the human soul, so that sound and thought wedded in fittest union should fill the heart with a rapture which should never pass away. This may be a dream of some ideal

age, but is it a thing impossible? If not, why should we not at least strive towards it? We have made successful attempts at introducing English opera to an American audience; we have found that even in its imperfect form the thing was feasible. We witnessed the performance of the English opera *troupe* at the Broadway Theatre last week, and found confirmation of our belief on this point in the character of the performance. The opera, Balfe's *Enchantress*, with an indifferent plot, hackneyed incident and sentiment, with very little *fine* music, and half spoken at that, still "drew." Will anybody be so absurd as to say that good music and fine sentiment would not be preferred by *any* audience and "draw" better? Can we not in the New World make another step in that direction in the world of the ideal.

The *troupe* we have mentioned is generally good; Miss Pyne particularly is a charming songstress as well as a good actress; her articulation is good, and she has an excellence which she deserves particular credit for, the comparative neglect of trills, cadenzas, &c., by which singers generally bring the house down, to the utter annihilation of the sentiment of the words, and often of that of the music. When common sense governs the opera, we shall have no more dying heroines giving us trills for a minute's duration, at the top of their voices, drawing their last breaths in transitions of octaves. Then we shall have a right to demand that singers make themselves secondary to their part, and obtrude not their forceful graces, to the extinction of propriety and good taste. Of Mr. Harrison we do not think so much. He sings false continually, all his upper notes falling below the pitch, and his execution is tricky. For instance, in one of the solos, where he wishes to do something particularly brilliant, in the way of sustaining a high note, he changed his voice into the falsetto, a device too shallow to win applause from any highly cultivated audience. Yet if people will deceive themselves by applauding difficult things instead of true ones, they deserve to be deceived in their turn. The choruses were good, particularly the "Ever be Happy." As a whole, the singing deserves the commendation the public generally has given it. We hope something from the permanence of an English opera.

AMONG the private collections in the time of King Charles II., the most important was probably that of Sir Peter Lely, who, at that time, filled the same place as portrait painter, which Van Dyck had occupied under Charles I. Among the one hundred and sixty-seven pictures which it contained there were two by Titian, eight by Paul Veronese, five by Rubens, and three by Claude. The principal pictures in the collection, however, were those of Van Dyck. Lely's collection was also rich in drawings by the great masters, especially by Raphael, Polidoro, and Michael Angelo, and also in engravings. After his death, the whole were sold by auction, in 1680. DR. WAAGEN.

A GREAT portrait painter must be a great mind, because no man can appreciate, and therefore cannot represent, in any other man, qualities of which he himself is not possessed. No man can fathom another's soul further than the depth of his own.

THE painter who seeks popularity in Art closes the door upon his own genius.—*Allston*.